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THE DOCTRINE OF Philosophical Necessity BRIEFLY INVALIDATED.

And, binding Nature fast in *Fate*,
Left *Free* the Human will.

POPE.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE ſubſtance of the following arguments was drawn up in a private correſpondence on the firſt appearance of Dr. PRIESTLEY'S ILLUSTRATIONS, *&c. and the writer, judging by himſelf, that it might give the readers of this controverſy pleaſure to ſee it placed in* various *points of view, ventured to let his little tract go to the preſs. The author cannot think his arguments amount to a* demonſtration; *(for ſeldom indeed do metaphyſical ſubjects admit of ſo cogent a proof) but he flatters himſelf, that they will be powerful enough to throw a ſtrong ſuſpicion on the truth of the doctrine he oppoſes; and ſuch a one as will give the ſuggeſtions of* common ſenſe *great weight in every philoſophic mind that is not already warped by ſome theoretic prejudice.—A deal might be urged on this laſt particular, but to ſay more would be inconſiſtent with the intended brevity of this tract; which is ſubmitted to the candour of the public with a better view than to animadvert on opinions, which might now be deemed in ſome degree perſonal.*

THE DOCTRINE OF

Philoſophical Neceſſity

BRIEFLY INVALIDATED.

IN examining the doctrine of neceſſity, I ſhall endeavour to bring what I have to ſay upon the ſubject into as narrow a compaſs as poſſible, and for that purpoſe the following axioms are premiſed; as in all ſciences, ſome principles muſt be taken for granted, elſe nothing can be proved.

AXIOM I. If we make a falſe ſuppoſition, and reaſon juſtly from it, a contradiction, or abſurdity will be contained in the concluſion. [To avoid ambiguity, it may be needful to obſerve here, that the reaſoning made uſe of to bring out the abſurdity,

abſurdity, muſt be of a proper and uniform kind; viz. geometrical, metaphyſical, moral, &c. according as the ſubject is of a geometrical, metaphyſical, or moral nature.]

Axiom II. It muſt likewiſe be taken for granted (as it does not admit of proof) that every action or exertion voluntarily made, is with a deſign, or in hopes of obtaining ſome end. [For, it is evident, where there is *a full conviction* of the impoſſibility of this, no rational being will make any attempt or exertion at all.]

Axiom III. All practical principles muſt either be *founded in truth*, or *believed to be ſo* for the moment that they operate.

Theſe axioms being taken for granted, let us ſuppoſe the doctrine of neceſſity to be *true*, and that its truth is diſcovered to us in ſuch a manner, and is ſo ſtrongly impreſſed upon our minds as to become a practical principle; then upon this ſuppoſition, by the ſecond axiom, motives of all kinds muſt ceaſe to operate.

To

To illuſtrate this, let us take one event, in which we are all equally concerned, viz. the time and circumſtances of our death. Suppoſing, therefore, that at, or before my entrance into this world, the time of my leaving it was *fixed*, and that I *entirely believed* it to be ſo; no circumſtance throughout life, no poſſible ſituation in which I could be placed, would operate as a motive, ſo as to make me uſe even the ſlighteſt endeavour, either to lengthen out, or ſhorten the period of my exiſtence. This muſt be allowed upon the ſuppoſition under conſideration. And if this be the caſe with regard to ſo momentous an event, it will certainly hold true of any other.

Hence this concluſion may be fairly drawn, viz. that where the doctrine of neceſſity is firmly believed, and made uſe of as a practical principle, *motives ceaſe to operate*. But, upon the certain and infallible *operation* of motives, the whole ſcheme of neceſſity is founded. This doctrine, therefore, taken in this light, is deſtructive of itſelf.

In

In the next place, let us ſuppoſe the doctrine of neceſſity to be true, but that it does not (as we find is really the caſe) operate as a practical principle, and then attend to the conſequence.

The following obſervations muſt be premiſed before this ſuppoſition can be properly examined.

A practical principle, for the *inſtant* that it operates, muſt be ſeen, or felt, to be ſpeculatively true, elſe it could not anſwer the end intended. For, a full conviction of its being falſe at the very time it ought to influence our conduct, would certainly deſtroy its effect. This I think cannot be denied. Examples in real life might be found in abundance to illuſtrate this ſuppoſition. We daily ſee errors in opinion (or of prejudice) made the foundation of our practice, which when our minds are better informed ceaſe to operate, and give place to the oppoſite truths.

Or in other words. The moment that the error of any practical principle is diſcovered, and in ſuch a manner as to preſent

ſent itſelf to us upon every occaſion, it will ceaſe to operate, and the oppoſite truth, will inſtantly take its place, and influence our conduct accordingly.

The next obſervation which I intend to ground my reaſoning upon, cannot be directly proved, but it is hoped its truth will not be denied me. I ſuppoſe then, that in a future ſtate, our faculties will be enlarged, our underſtandings enlightened, and our apprehenſions quickened in ſuch a degree, that the truths which we now attain to with difficulty and much ſtudy, will then appear as axioms, or be claſſed amongſt the firſt principles of our knowledge, and hence ſerve as a baſis for making further diſcoveries by reaſon. This muſt be the caſe upon the natural ſuppoſition, that the righteous in another life, make a *continual progreſs* in *knowledge* and happineſs.

If therefore, as was ſuppoſed before, philoſophical neceſſity be a *truth*, and likewiſe diſcoverable by human reaſon; in ſome future period of our exiſtence, liberty, as oppoſed to this *truth*, muſt ceaſe to operate as a practical principle, and give place to

ideas of neceſſity, which, like all intuitive truths, will ever be preſent to the mind, and, conſequently, as has been proved before, reduce us to a ſtate entirely torpid.

Here then is diſcovered a barrier or limit, to which human nature in its progreſs in *knowledge* can never arrive; and which the ſubtile metaphyſician by ſtanding on tip-toe has already got a ſight of.—Muſt we then in a future ſtate be under the diſagreeable neceſſity of petitioning the Deity to darken our underſtandings, and blunt our penetration, in order that we may enjoy the greater happineſs? *Common ſenſe* revolts from ſuch an idea!

If analogical reaſoning be allowed of, the above concluſion may be applied with equal force to all ſuperior beings, and the ſame limit preſcribed to their progreſs in knowledge.

From what has been ſaid above, I think it is very evident, ſuppoſing neceſſity to obtain, that intelligence when increaſed to a certain degree is deſtructive of activity; or in other words, that intelligence and activity

activity cannot exiſt together in the ſame ſubject, unleſs the firſt of theſe be confined within certain limits. One of theſe limits has juſt been pointed out, and the other muſt coincide with *nothing*. For, where there is no intelligence, activity is not to be conceived. Now, this conſequence, or that activity ſhould be deſtroyed by the rational faculties being enlarged, is ſurely exceedingly paradoxical; and hence, adopting principles which lead directly to it, is certainly going a long way to ſerve an hypotheſis.

It perhaps may be objected, that even in a being whoſe faculties are ſufficiently enlarged to ſee every thing as it really is, and who claſſes the doctrine of neceſſity among intuitive truths, his motives and propenſities to action may be increaſed in the ſame proportion, and therefore his activity prevented from being deſtroyed.

The laſt mentioned axiom is a ſufficient anſwer to this objection. For, it has been there obſerved, that when this doctrine has taken full poſſeſſion of the mind, no motives *however ſtrong* can operate to any effect.

Hence, till the contrary of this can be proved, the arguments above made uſe of remain in full force, and all the abſurdities that have been pointed out as connected with this doctrine, muſt ſtand or fall along with it.

To illuſtrate this ſubject a little further. It may be obſerved, that many truths which are ſcarcely within the ken of children, become afterwards, *when they are grown to maturity*, ſelf-evident principles, and take the name of axioms. If this be the caſe, and this life be but the infancy of our exiſtence, the doctrine of neceſſity, which we have already got a ſight of, muſt by analogy, in a future ſtate, become a part of our intuitive knowledge.

Again: Let us ſuppoſe the mental faculties of ſome acute metaphyſician to be a little enlarged, and that by brooding over the doctrine a ſufficient time, it takes ſuch firm poſſeſſion of his mind, as to preſent itſelf upon every occaſion in the ſame manner as any other intuitive truth; will he not by this means be brought into a worſe ſituation than the madman who imagined that

that he was made of glaſs? The fear of being broken to pieces kept this perſon inactive, and if the ſuppoſition had been *true*, the epithet *mad* would have been very improperly applied to him. But though the principle gone upon by the philoſopher is here ſuppoſed to be really true, and his ſubſequent reaſoning quite accurate, he is brought thereby into as bad, nay even into a worſe ſituation than the madman; for the more he contemplates the ſubject, the more obſtinate his complaint muſt grow; whereas the madman ſtands a chance for cure, if by proper examination he can be convinced of his error. Hence it appears, that it is equally unfortunate to know either too much or too little.

However abſurd ſuch *concluſions* may ſeem, however contrary to our warmeſt hopes and wiſhes, they are the *inevitable* conſequence of ſuppoſing the doctrine of neceſſity to be true.—If therefore the above reaſoning can be depended upon, by the firſt axiom this doctrine muſt be groundleſs.

The two pillars upon which the doctrine of philoſophical neceſſity ſtands, are the *infallible*

infallible operation of motives, and the *Divine Prefcience*; each of which we will now proceed to examine.

If being determined by motives, or acting according to reaſon, which means preciſely the ſame thing, conſtitute neceſſity, no rational being can be free; indeed it is not poſſible to conceive ſuch a ſtate. Even the Author of the univerſe, might we venture to reaſon concerning the Divine Nature, muſt be as abſolutely under the influence of this principle, as the loweſt of his creatures. But, where ever there is neceſſity, it muſt be impoſed; it cannot be conceived otherwiſe. With regard to mankind, the neceſſity muſt be impoſed by the Deity, but who or what muſt impoſe it upon him? If the *nature of things* be called this powerful agent, we are amuſing ourſelves with words without meaning, for the attributes of all beings are juſt what he has made them. If therefore neceſſity *be impoſed* (and it cannot be conceived otherwiſe, any more than that a body of any particular ſhape has never *been figured*) it muſt be by a *Superior*.

It

It will now, I imagine, be thought high time to examine the principle adopted, and the arguments made uſe of, by which ſuch a monſtrous abſurdity is brought forth.—The *principle* is *philoſophical neceſſity* with regard to the human ſpecies. The *arguments* are analogical; going in a direct line from the human to the Divine Nature. If we ſuppoſe the firſt to be falſe, the diſpute is at an end, indeed it is begging the queſtion; the arguments muſt therefore be called in queſtion, and accordingly examined, for, one or both muſt inevitably be erroneous.

By whatever method philoſophical neceſſity is proved with regard to the human ſpecies, the ſame arguments will apply with equal force to all beings, whoſe faculties are the ſame as theirs in kind, however ſuperior in degree. The error therefore muſt ariſe from reaſoning *analogically*, or from *one* kind of being, to *another* whoſe nature is *eſſentially different*. And this indeed I take to be a fruitful ſource of error both in metaphyſics and divinity.

Now

Now, the object upon which we firſt exerciſe the reaſoning faculty, is matter; its impulſes, motions, &c. and our language is framed accordingly, and becomes frequently figurative when applied *to other ſubſtances*, and our reaſoning at the ſame time analogical. And, the reaſoning by which philoſophical neceſſity is proved, is in a great meaſure analogous to that made uſe of concerning impulſe and motion; * and

* The neceſſarian aſſerts that the *ſoul* cannot act or think, until it be firſt acted upon, and likewiſe that the intenſity, &c. of its action is exactly proportioned to the cauſe that produced it. [Any variation in the manner or direction of its thinking or acting, he accounts for in the ſame manner.]

The natural philoſopher aſſerts that *matter* cannot move, or act upon other matter, till it firſt be acted upon, and that the intenſity, &c. of its action is exactly proportioned to the cauſe that produced it. [Likewiſe that any variation in its direction or manner of acting muſt be accounted for in the ſame way.] From this view of *matter*, the philoſopher looks upon it as entirely *inert*; and muſt not the neceſſarian, for reaſons equally ſtrong, come to the ſame concluſion concerning the *ſoul*, or thinking principle in man? And, if this be granted, I imagine it will be allowed by all ſides to have no higher origin

and, as matter and the thinking principle in man are (perhaps) eſſentially different, is there not, from what has juſt gone before, a ſtrong preſumption that the proof may not be altogether to be depended upon? If the foregoing reaſoning be of any weight, the concluſion to be drawn from thence muſt be quite obvious. For, from the ſuppoſition of the above-mentioned principle being *true*, the *arguments* by

 which

origin than any other part of the animal machine. Hence, I think it will eaſily appear, that a neceſſarian, by purſuing this principle, muſt likewiſe be a materialiſt.—But, ſhould this difficulty be got over, or rather be looked upon as none at all, there ſtill remains one behind, even upon this ſuppoſition, which, to me at leaſt, appears unanſwerable.

For, ſhould the neceſſarian be aſked *why* he will not allow that the ſoul can act or think till it firſt be acted upon, perhaps he may anſwer, that he cannot *conceive* it to be poſſible; as a better reaſon, I believe, will not eaſily be found. But, may not his opponent make uſe of the ſame argument againſt the doctrine of materialiſm, upon which that of neceſſity ſeems to be founded? For, he may ſafely affirm that he cannot *conceive* how any particular arrangement or modification of the *inert* partcles of matter can make the compound capable of perception. Hence, where arguments equally ſtrong oppoſe each other, nothing can be proved,

which this truth is proved, are found to be *fallacious;* that is, the arguing analogically from one ſubſtance to another whoſe nature is eſſentially different, cannot be juſtified.

It will eaſily be perceived, I do not give this in the demonſtrative ſtile, but only ſuggeſt, where it appears probable to me an error may lie concealed. It is a ſubject which would bear to be conſiderably enlarged upon, but to give a hint for further conſideration was all I deſigned.

The arguments in favour of neceſſity drawn from the *Divine Preſcience*, come now to be examined.

Events which are foreſeen by us, muſt be certain and determined in every circumſtance in which they are foreſeen. This is quite evident; indeed it is only expreſſing the ſame thing different ways. The remark will likewiſe hold true with reſpect to every other being, how much ſoever ſuperior to man, who looks upon time and place; upon paſt, preſent, and future, in the ſame light that we do; that is, to

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all intelligences whoſe faculties are the *ſame* in kind, however ſuperior to each other in degree, and conſequently whoſe eſſence is the ſame.—But can we draw the ſame concluſion with the ſame certainty concerning the *fore-knowledge* of that *Being* whoſe eſſence is *entirely different* from ours? I have before endeavoured to prove the fallaciouſneſs of this kind of reaſoning.—Taking it for granted that neceſſity obtains with regard to man, from thence aſcending to the Deity, an abſurdity was found in the concluſion. In this caſe if it be allowed, that every thing fore-known by man is certainly fixed and determined, from thence aſcending to the Deity, is there not room to expect that an equal or ſimilar abſurdity will be found in the concluſion? For, if there be an error, it ariſes from the ſame cauſe in each caſe; that is, from applying the ſame kind of arguments to finite and infinite, or to beings whoſe eſſences are entirely different.—But, if the ſame cauſe operate in each caſe, it muſt have the ſame effect.

From what has gone before, I think it may be inferred, that the two principles

or ſources from which the doctrine of neceſſity is proved (viz. the infallible operation of motives in the manner the neceſſarian underſtands it, and the Divine Preſcience) cannot both be true. For, either we muſt, or we muſt not be allowed to carry our arguments from the human to the Divine Nature.—In the firſt caſe we have found a groſs abſurdity to be the conſequence of taking this doctrine for granted; therefore by the firſt axiom it muſt be falſe as proved by the operation of motives.—But in the ſecond caſe, if we cannot argue from the human to the Divine Nature, the Divine Preſcience cannot be brought as *any proof of its being true*, as has been ſhewn above.

Now, as the advocates for this doctrine have attempted to prove its truth by arguments drawn from each of theſe ſources, and given the concluſions thence ariſing with equal confidence; the having demonſtrated that *both* cannot be depended upon, will I think appear as a preſumptive proof againſt the infallibility of either. And if this be allowed, our *feelings* and *common ſenſe*, which are ſtrongly on the ſide of liberty,

liberty, will greatly outweigh all doubtful metaphyſical concluſions on this intricate ſubject.

If, in objection to the above reaſoning, it be aſſerted, that the *knowledge* of the Deity is the ſame in kind with ours, and that he is *ſelf-determined*. I would aſk whether it be not as difficult to conceive a rational being to be actuated and determined by reaſons, or motives, in a manner *altogether different* from what happens among mankind, as to conceive the *knowledge* of any being to be *different* in *kind* from ours? For, if we attempt to examine into the meaning of *ſelf-determined*, we ſhall find ourſelves entirely at a loſs, and not able to affix any ideas at all to the term.—If, therefore, the *knowledge* of the Deity muſt be the *ſame* in *kind* with ours, becauſe we cannot conceive it otherwiſe, will it not follow, for the very ſame reaſon, that he muſt be determined by motives or reaſons in the ſame manner as we are?

The neceſſarian therefore begs the queſtion when he admits one ſuppoſition and rejects the other, according as his ſide of the argument

gument requires it. But if, as is moſt conſiſtent, both be treated in the ſame manner, that is, both ſuppoſed to be different from what we experience among mankind, we ſhall avoid ſeveral abſurdities.—However, if any perſon ſhould ſtill imagine, that he can conceive what is meant by the Deity's being ſelf-determined, I muſt inſiſt upon it, that he has as clear an idea of the ſame thing in himſelf, and therefore meaſured by this ſtandard, he is equally free. Hence, in this caſe, the arguments of the neceſſarian may be turned againſt himſelf. For, if God be ſelf-determined, and conſequently free, and it may as eaſily be conceived that man is ſelf-determined (and no other circumſtance be taken into the account) it may with the ſame certainty be concluded that man is free.

This ſubject, though of ſome conſequence in the *theory*, can be of no uſe in the *practice* of morals. For, it may be taken for granted, that principles which do not influence our practice are altogether uſeleſs; and it has been proved above, that philoſophical neceſſity cannot act as a practical principle.

Though

Though this concluſion concerning neceſſity will certainly hold true, as to the bulk of mankind, yet it is much to be feared, that it may furniſh the half-learned libertine with an excuſe for the commiſſion of every crime.

Let us now recapitulate in a few words what has been ſaid upon this ſubject.

In the firſt place, I have endeavoured to prove the fallaciouſneſs and abſurdity of this doctrine by conſiderations drawn from human nature in an improved ſtate: Then attempted to demoliſh *one*, at leaſt, of the two pillars upon which it ſtands, and by that means (as they were looked upon to be equally firm) to raiſe a ſtrong ſuſpicion that the *other* is neither ſo well founded, nor ſo much to be depended upon, as the neceſſarian has ſuppoſed. This airy metaphyſical fabric being brought into ſo tottering a ſituation, I have then called in the aſſiſtance of our *feelings* and *common ſenſe* in order to complete the demolition.

The *inutility* of this doctrine has likewiſe been demonſtrated. And as true cauſes

or principles in reaſoning, are generally attended with ſalutary effects or concluſions, the want of this reſult or badge of truth, ought alſo to make us cautious in this enquiry, that we be not impoſed upon by the mere force of metaphyſical ſubtilty and ingenuity.

FINIS.